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**VULNERABILITY OF THE ISLAND STATES:
CASE STUDIES**

May 31, 1985

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Analyst: Robert Handloff

PREFACE

The West's continued dependency on oil from the Persian Gulf, as well as the recognized importance to all major powers of forward tactical bases, has focused attention on the strategic value of the island states--Cape Verde, Sao Tome y Principe, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar, Comoro Islands, Seychelles, and Mauritius--off the East and West coasts of Africa. These mini-republics lie astride the sea lanes linking the Gulf with Western Europe and the United States, and, in some cases, have harbor or aviation facilities which could be used as forward bases for the global powers. At the same time, virtually all of the island states have brittle if not broken economies, and so depend on foreign aid from Eastern or Western sources for their very survival. The possibility that the Soviet Union could exploit the political vulnerability of the island states and extend its hegemony over any of them has elicited concern from some Western strategists. This paper questions that possibility by examining the political economy of each state and analyzing the significance of local and exiled opposition groups. The conclusion is that the Soviet's inability to match Western largess severely limits Moscow's influence with any of the island republics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Though recognized as states by the international community, the seven island countries off the east and west coasts of Africa--Cape Verde, Sao Tome y Principe, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar, Comoro Islands, Seychelles, and Mauritius--are, by all accounts, weak and vulnerable "soft" states. All too often their governments must share their presumed monopoly on coercive force with real or potential rivals, and their economies depend on Western generosity, notwithstanding a great diversity in resources, populations, and both economic and political development. Lacking industrial and manufacturing sectors of any significance and being highly dependent on imports, the island states are caught between the certainty of demand for foreign goods and the uncertainty of their ability to earn sufficient foreign exchange to pay for them. All attempts they have made to assert control over their respective local economies have proven ineffectual. Stockpiling--one way of controlling import prices--is difficult and costly, so fluctuations in supply are often highly disruptive to already fragile distribution systems. Technology and the expertise to exploit it are also costly. In the face of growing populations, a lack of capital, and few investment opportunities, there is a strong incentive for more capable individuals to emigrate, thus further diminishing the local labor pool and forcing local governments to rely on more highly paid foreign nationals. With few exceptions, consumption-oriented governments, whose members enjoy a standard of living far in excess of the national average, weigh down the already burdened monocrop economies. To a large extent these states exist as such only because the international community has conferred juridical statehood upon them and responded to their moral claims for resources.

The economic problems of the island states hold political consequences. In the small, closed societies comprising the respective island populations, conflicts inevitably arise between small, private loyalties and the need for wider, public allegiances. Politically, personal factions replace impersonal parties. Vast differences in wealth, often accumulated at the expense of public interests, foster unrealistic expectations among the less privileged, who feel increasingly frustrated and alienated. Moreover, having only recently escaped the burden--real or imagined--of colonial exploitation, these small states willingly employ the anticolonial rhetoric characteristic of the left. Given the potentially important location of the island states, these political problems create opportunities which the Soviet Union could manipulate and exploit for its own strategic purposes.

The possibility that the Soviet Union could extend its hegemony over any of the island states has elicited concern from some Western strategists who note the importance of the sea lanes in or near which the islands lie. In fact, these concerns seem exaggerated. Any Soviet threat to the sea lanes around Africa would constitute a causus belli, thus jeopardizing equally Soviet shipping in the same sea lanes. Because those sea lanes are the principal route for transporting bulk shipments between western and eastern regions of the Soviet Union, Moscow is as dependent on open seas as is the West. Second, the principal reason for interdicting shipping around the coast of Africa would be to halt the flow of Gulf oil to the West. That same result could be accomplished more quickly and efficiently by simply destroying the Middle East oil production sites, which are easily within range of Soviet or

Afghanistan-based aircraft and missiles. In that light, the actual strategic importance of the island republics diminishes considerably.

2. CAPE VERDE

a. Physical and Human Geography

The Republic of Cape Verde, a group of 10 islands (9 inhabited) and 5 islets, lies 400 kilometers west of Dakar, Senegal, in the Atlantic Ocean. It formally received its independence from Portugal in 1975. While it lacks a natural deep-water harbor, Cape Verde does have a large airfield constructed and maintained by South Africa, which uses the facility as a refueling stop on its flights to Europe. Cape Verde's location could, under certain circumstances, impart a strategic value to the islands, first as a base for air and sea reconnaissance over important sea lanes linking Africa with the Middle East, Western Europe, and the United States, and second, as a refueling stop enroute to southern Africa or the Middle East.

The Cape Verde archipelago is further subdivided into two districts: Windward (capital at Mindelo) and Leeward (capital at Praia). The administrative capital of the Republic is Praia on the island of Sao Tiago, but the largest city is Mindelo, with a population of 40,000, on the island of Sao Vicente. The total population (1980 census estimates) is just under 300,000 with an additional 300,000 to 500,000 living overseas, with the majority in the United States. (That fact alone constitutes a strong incentive for retaining ties with the West, while weighing heavily against Soviet inroads.)

b. Economy

Cape Verde's principal economic activity is subsistence agriculture, yet annual food production amounts to less than 10 percent of total food needs. Agriculture is labor intensive; 54 percent of farms are less than 1 hectare while only 3 percent are over 5 hectares. Non-farm production is minimal. The most important non-agricultural industry is fishing and fish processing. Otherwise, most manufacturing falls under the rubric of artisanal crafts.

The government has accorded a high priority to preventing famine through food aid and emergency development programs financed by foreign grants. Given the low productivity of land and an abundance of labor, government-sponsored development programs focus primarily on conservation and land reform that would, when implemented, eliminate absentee land ownership. At the same time, the government must remain sensitive to the wishes of emigre absentee landlords whose hard-currency remittances along with aid account for two-thirds of the GNP.

c. Government and Politics

Cape Verde, a former colony of Portugal, is a single-party state. The African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV) was born as the result of a split within the ranks of its predecessor, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC). The break followed the 1980 coup in Guinea-Bissau that overturned the government of Luiz Cabral,

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a Cape Verdean. As with most single-party states in Africa, government and party tend to be congruent. While the Government guarantees rights to free speech, a free press, and freedom of association, petition, and demonstration, as a practical matter no organizations antithetical to governmental policy would be permitted. Beyond its somewhat authoritarian paternalism, the ideology of the government defies simplistic labeling. In general, however, it pursues statist economic policies under the assumption that Cape Verde's severe economic straits would offer private enterprise very few opportunities. According to US State Department sources, some Cape Verdean emigrants have complained of human-rights abuses on the islands. The complaints, however, are few and do not reflect the existence of any widespread opposition group. Former colonists and some emigres who oppose the regime and are currently living on the Iberian peninsula have formed the Independent Democratic Union of Cape Verde (UCID). Again, they have enlisted little sympathy.

Internally, the government enjoys widespread support fostered in no small measure by the shared understanding that existence in Cape Verde is precarious. Also, the population is fairly homogenous, thus without the ethnic conflicts that plague other states. Unions, another possible source of opposition, are firmly entrenched within the structure of the party. To avoid potential problems, the meager resources at the government's disposal are distributed equally among the islands. Finally, the government and party permit just enough critical debate and political activity to vent political pressure, yet all important decisions continue to be the exclusive responsibility of an elite Council of Ministers.

d. Assessment of Vulnerability to East Bloc

In its foreign policy statements, the government stridently asserts its membership in the non-aligned movement. Notwithstanding lapses into leftist rhetoric, Cape Verde remains almost utterly dependent on the West. For example, severe drought in 1981 forced the government to import virtually all of its food, which for the most part came from Western nations. Under these conditions, it is highly unlikely that the population or Government of Cape Verde would be susceptible to political subversion on behalf of less generous East-bloc countries. Alternatively, it is in the interest of government and people to remain on good terms with all possible donors from East or West.

3. SAO TOME Y PRINCIPE

a. Physical and Human Geography

The Democratic Republic of Sao Tome y Principe, a former Portuguese colony, is (after the Republic of Seychelles) the smallest independent state in Africa. It comprises two main islands, Sao Tome and Principe, in the Gulf of Guinea, each approximately 250 kilometers off the coast of Gabon, plus a string of rocky islets ranging southward toward the equator. The population is approximately 95,000 and, like that of Cape Verde, without the significant ethnic divisions that might provoke strife. As with the other island states, the country could be construed as possibly having strategic value as either a reconnaissance base, or staging area. Perhaps more significantly, Sao Tome is within striking range of oil fields in Cameroon, Gabon, and Nigeria.

b. Economy

Sao Tome, the major island (Principe has a population of less than 10,000), epitomizes a dependent, monoculture, plantation economy, with the single cash crop of cocoa accounting for close to 90 percent of total earnings. Moreover, the islands import close to 90 percent of their food needs; consequently, the lack of foreign exchange routinely results in shortages. For both exports and imports, the islands are dependent on external prices and markets primarily in Portugal, the Netherlands, the United States, and West Germany. To be sure, there has been some diversification since independence in 1975, when bananas and livestock production were introduced with foreign assistance; however, for the foreseeable future the island's economy will remain heavily dependent on cocoa. There is virtually no large-scale manufacturing. Small factories process local resources to produce soap, beverages, foodstuffs, and textiles.

Following independence, the state nationalized the large plantations and today controls approximately 90 percent of cocoa production. The estates are managed by committees having the responsibility for, among other things, hiring labor at set wages. The state is also the sole marketing agent. The remaining 10 percent of the farms are privately held. Given the low prices paid to private producers, there is little incentive to increase production. On the far more important government-held estates the technology is, at best, archaic. As a consequence, cocoa production has dropped precipitously since independence from 10,000 metric tons to as low as 3,779 tons in 1978. Also, severe drought in the 1982-83 growing season hampered a moderately successful, government-backed rehabilitation program. Lower world prices for cocoa have also contributed to the nation's economic woes.

Finally, the economy suffers a chronic shortage of labor, which is not likely to be rectified, given the history of exploitation and oppressive labor practices on the island during the colonial era. Meanwhile, labor shortages have not translated into labor strength because most workers come from the mainland on 3-year contracts and are easily replaced. Moreover, widely dispersed plantations are notoriously difficult for labor to organize.

c. Government and Politics

Since gaining independence in 1975, Sao Tome y Principe has been a single-party state governed by the Liberation Movement of Sao Tome y Principe (MLSTP), with political power concentrated in the president. Until now, he has been elected unopposed. At least nominally--and until recently--the state in its domestic policy committed itself to socialism and agrarian reform. Opposition is prohibited, and freedoms of expression are highly circumscribed. All legitimate media are under government control, as are trade unions and other cultural and social organizations. An effective, if rudimentary, system of informers allows the government to monitor and identify lower-level dissidents. Consequently, there is no significant opposition on the islands. Small groups of exiles currently reside in Portugal and Gabon; none, however, poses a threat to the government, reinforced as it is by as many as 600 Cuban troops and advisers. At the same time, the state still experiences a surprising level of political agitation as manifested by frequent changes among top-level cabinet office holders.

d. Assessment of Vulnerability to the East Bloc

Following independence Sao Tome y Principe adopted a radical stance in its foreign policy; however, growing dissatisfaction with distressfully inadequate levels of Soviet aid has led the government to reevaluate its ties to the East bloc. President Pinto da Costa has recently met with Omar Bongor, his Gabonese counterpart, signaling a thaw in relations between the two countries. The president has also replaced his foreign minister and minister of planning, both of whom were staunch supporters of leftist policies. Finally, Sao Tome y Principe's nearly total reliance on Western aid, coupled with the government's disappointment with Soviet aid, portends continuing movement away from its earlier, pro-Soviet orientation, as well as improved relations with its African neighbors and a more liberal political culture. Opposition from the left is as unlikely to have any impact on government policies as protests from the right.

4. EQUATORIAL GUINEA

a. Physical and Human Geography

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea consists of the island of Bioko (formerly known as Fernando Po or, from 1968 until 1979, Macias Nguema Biyogo) located in the Bight of Biafra some 40 kilometers off the coast of Cameroon, and the mainland enclave of Rio Muni, along with three coastal islets. Equatorial Guinea also includes the island of Annobon, which lies at the extreme end of the Guinean archipelago south of Sao Tome. Its location near the oil fields of Gabon and Nigeria gives Equatorial Guinea a certain strategic importance; however, it lacks the deep-water harbor, long airstrip, or other facilities necessary for basing and maintaining attack and reconnaissance units.

The geography of Bioko is marked by contrasts. Malabo, its largest city and the capital of Equatorial Guinea, has an average temperature of 77 degrees F. and receives an annual average rainfall of 2,000 mm, making it one of the most inhospitable cities in the Bight. In the center of the island, however, is Pico de Moka, a mountain of alpine height with an environment permitting horse and cattle raising. Rio Muni, tucked into Gabon just beneath Cameroon, is a heavily forested area of small villages.

The population of Equatorial Guinea is approximately 250,000, although there are reportedly as many as 100,000 others in exile in Gabon, Cameroon, and Spain. Its racial composition is complex for such a small state and contributes to political instability. In Rio Muni, the Fang are the dominant ethnic group, constituting close to 90 percent of the population. There are also several non-Fang coastal groups which have been compressed into smaller coastal enclaves by Fang pressure. On Bioko live the Bubi, who number about 15,000; a few thousand Fernandino, the descendants of former slaves liberated by the British; and several longstanding communities of immigrants from Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon, who, with the Fernandino and Bubi, formerly constituted a black bourgeoisie. As a result of Fang policies, their status has diminished considerably. Traditionally, the largest population group on the island has been the mass of Nigerian contract laborers working the cocoa plantations. A deteriorating economy, coupled with maltreatment,

has led to an almost total repatriation of Nigerian nationals and their partial replacement by some 20,000 Fang forced laborers from the mainland.

b. Economy

Prior to independence, Equatorial Guinea had a thriving, self-sufficient economy--a rarity in sub-Saharan Africa--able to boast the highest per capita export trade of all sub-Saharan Africa. The 11-year rule of President Macias Nguema (1968-79) virtually devastated the economy, and by 1981 Equatorial Guinea was on the verge of bankruptcy. The Bubi and Fernandino cocoa, coffee, and banana plantations which, prior to independence, literally subsidized the mainland, have been allowed to deteriorate. Similarly Bioko soap, chocolate, and palm-oil manufacturing have simply disappeared. Cocoa production, 90 percent of which takes place on the island of Bioko, dropped from 38,000 tons in 1966-67 to less than 5,000 tons in 1979. That total has changed little, yet cocoa still accounts for 97 percent of export earnings. Similarly, coffee output, which fell from 8,450 tons in 1968 to 271 tons in 1981, had risen only to 600 tons by 1983. In the 5 years since Lieutenant Colonel Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo overthrew his uncle in a coup on 25 August 1979, the economy has shown few signs of recovery. The principal economic activity, especially on the mainland, is subsistence agriculture. Farmers grow sweet potatoes, cassava, coconuts, palm kernels, and bananas. There is also some livestock production and timber harvesting on Bioko, albeit under foreign control. Industrial activity is minimal, simply providing for local needs. In recent years, the country has survived only because Spain has been willing to purchase agricultural produce at highly subsidized prices.

c. Government and Politics

The Macias regime, and to a lesser extent the present government of his nephew, have ruled by plunder, pillaging, and repression. The head of state has untrammelled power. For example, members of the president's family have appropriated nearly all mainland coffee plantations with no recompense for the original owners. Serving the president in an advisory capacity is a Supreme Military Council which corresponds to a cabinet, all of the members of which have been appointed by the head of state. Similarly all 41 members of the People's House of Representatives were nominated by President Obiang Nguema and elected unopposed. At lower levels the bureaucracy is non-functioning. Discrimination against minority groups, harassment, and petty corruption, are all common. Although the Fang represent about 70 percent of the total population, they are heavily overrepresented in both the military and civil administrations, the two most important sources of salaried employment. This situation is especially apparent on Bioko, where the Bubi outnumber the Fang.

In Equatorial Guinea, constitutional freedoms are simply empty promises. Although there are no official restrictions on the press, all communications media are government owned. Moreover, there apparently is little concern for relaying information. For example, the single newspaper published one issue in 1984. There are also no restrictions governing private associations; however, participation in any type of opposition group would result in loss of employment and ostracism from the ruling circle, from which all privileges flow.

Local opposition includes the Roman Catholic Church, which seeks a return to democracy and civilian rule. Otherwise, there are several splinter groups, based in Europe, which oppose the government on both ideological and ethnic grounds. A group of Bubi and Fernandino exiles in Spain have formed the Front for the Liberation of Fernando Po, which seeks complete independence for the island. In addition, Manuel Ruben Ndongo, a self-described exile leader, heads the Democratic Reunion for the Liberation of Equatorial Guinea (RDLGE), which he calls a government-in-exile, in Paris. He has no supporters, however, and has received no recognition from the diplomatic community. Two other groups, including the National Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy under Martin Okomo and the Revolutionary Command Council of Socialist Guinean Patriots and Cadres under Daniel Oyono, seek an end to the Nguema tyranny and a return to more democratic rule.

d. Assessment of Vulnerability to East Bloc

During the Macias administration, Equatorial Guinea received military support and little else from Cuba and the Soviet Union, both of which considered Macias an unpredictable and unreliable leader. President Obiang Nguema halted purchases from both countries shortly after overthrowing his uncle and subsequently downgraded the diplomatic relationships so as to present his desperately poor regime to the West in a more favorable light. East bloc opportunities for infiltrating and manipulating political opposition groups are rife; however, the purpose of such intervention remains problematic, given the continuing crises in Equatorial Guinea, and would entail an enormous cost.

5. MADAGASCAR

a. Physical and Human Geography

The Democratic Republic of Madagascar (previously the Malagasy Republic) includes the island of Madagascar, the fourth largest island in the world, as well as several much smaller islands nearby. The island is separated from the mainland by the Mozambique Channel, which is about 420 kilometers wide at its narrowest point. Madagascar has a deep-water port and extensive maintenance facilities at Toamasina, as well as airfields capable of accommodating large jets at Antananarivo, the capital, and at Mahajanga, and Nossi-Be. Madagascar's basic geological composition is crystalline rock, which has led one agricultural economist to claim its soil is the color of a brick--and just as fertile. The island is 1600 kilometers along the north-south axis and up to 570 kilometers wide, allowing a wide range of climatic conditions from tropical rain forests along the monsoon coasts (east and northwest) to the desert-like south. The central highlands are a temperate zone.

Madagascar's population in 1981 was just under 9 million. Although there are numerous ethnic groups representing successive waves of immigrants from areas as diverse as central Africa, East Asia, and the Middle East, the society is relatively homogeneous. Nonetheless, there remains a latent antagonism that dates from the period of French colonial rule between the Merina of the central highlands and the various coastal groups.

b. Economy

The economy of the island is highly diversified. Agriculture remains the dominant sector, accounting for 80 percent of exports and 30 percent of the GNP. Most agriculture is in the hands of independent peasant producers, who are typically underpaid and therefore have few incentives to increase production. State-controlled plantations are plagued by corruption and inefficiency. Industry accounts for only 19 percent of the GNP, and includes primarily food processing and textile manufacturing for local consumption, as well as cement, boat construction, paper, and some agricultural machinery. Plants currently operate at about one-third of capacity for want of adequate inputs. To a far greater extent than in agriculture, the government exercises control over industry, either as principal stockholder or through pervasive regulations that establish production, profit, and import quotas. As in the state-run agricultural enterprises, corruption, inefficiency, and diffused responsibility are the norm.

c. Government and Politics

Madagascar is governed by a president and the National Popular Assembly elected by direct, universal suffrage, and a Supreme Revolutionary Council chosen by both the President and the Assembly. Participation in the government is limited to the National Front for the Defense of the Revolution (FNDR), which comprises seven political parties. Nominally, all seven share a commitment to socialism, yet their political positions range from a relatively moderate, pro-Western stance to a pro-Soviet position.

Forming the nucleus of FNDR is Avant-Garde of the Malagasy Revolution (AREMA), the party of current president Ratsiraka, yet AREMA itself is split. Opposition to Ratsiraka, who is from the coast, or to the ruling AREMA party is based on ideological differences and, to a lesser extent, ethnic rivalry between Merina and coastal groups. The AREMA right, linked to a plot against Ratsiraka in 1982, finds support mainly among the Merina and opposes the socialist rhetoric of the president. The official opposition party within FNDR is the National Movement for the Independence of Madagascar (MONIMA), under the leadership of long-time rival to Ratsiraka, Monja Jaona, himself a political prisoner from 1982 to 1983. Traditionally MONIMA, a radical socialist party in the European context, has identified with southern peasant farmers; however, most recently, its support has shifted to the urban poor. A third party under the FNDR umbrella is the National Spirit for National Unity (Vonjy), which draws support from coastal moderates. Competing for votes on the left is the Movement for Proletarian Power (MFM/MFT), which is supported and led by coastal intellectuals. The party campaigns on the slogan of "Power to the People," and generally supports Ratsiraka. The pro-Soviet party is Party of the Congress for the Independence of Madagascar (AKFM), under the leadership of Pastor Richard Andriamanjato, a Merina intellectual and member of the upper-middle-class from which the party draws much of its membership. While socially conservative, the party curiously espouses a pro-Soviet orthodoxy. Evidence from recent elections shows that AKFM is losing ground to other, more ideologically consistent parties. A recent, non-political source of opposition has been the Catholic Church, which has spoken out against the anti-democratic abuses by the government.

d. Assessment of Vulnerability to the East Bloc

The Soviet-Malagasy courtship began in the mid-1970s when Ratsiraka became president and began implementing his own brand of socialism, which included a petulant anti-Westernism directed primarily against the United States. At the same time, he turned increasingly to the East bloc for technical expertise, vocational training, and military materiel. Only recently have Malagasy relations with the United States, West Germany, and Japan again assume importance, largely due to Madagascar's chronic economic crises. Given the plethora of political actors, East bloc opportunities for countering this resurgent Western influence are everpresent. At the same time, the Soviets will encounter obstacles caused in no small measure by their inadequate response to Madagascar's pressing needs. France in fact, has once again become Madagascar's largest donor, while the United States has reestablished diplomatic ties and aid. In response, Ratsiraka's government has undertaken a series of changes in line with World Bank recommendations, including a currency devaluation, the elimination of subsidies, an increase both in tariffs and the price of foods, and a general liberalization of trade and pricing policies. Perhaps more indicative of Ratsiraka's shift has been the dismantling of a Soviet signals-intelligence station at the request of the US Government.

6. COMORO ISLANDS

a. Physical and Human Geography

The Comoros archipelago, strategically located at the northern end of the Mozambique Channel, consists of four small islands having a total area of 2,236 square kilometers, plus numerous tiny islets and coral outcroppings. The Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros is a federation of three of the islands: Njazidja (Grande-Comore), Nzwani (Anjouan), and Mwali (Moheli). (At independence the government formally changed the French names for the islands, although the earlier names still enjoy currency.) The Republic also lays claim to Mahore (Mayotte), the fourth island of the chain, whose residents, at the time of independence in 1975, voted to remain with France. Given their location, the islands could easily be used to interdict shipping, including tanker traffic from the Middle East toward Europe, passing through the Mozambique Channel. The islands have one international airport and a modest deep-water port under construction by the French. Although the islands are all geologically similar, there are wide divergencies in topography, vegetation, economic activity, and social structure.

The population of approximately 410,000 (1980) is highly segmented along ethnic lines and, like that of Madagascar, reflects the pattern of waves of immigration, and includes East Asians, Africans, Indonesians, Persians, and Arabs, as well as descendants of Dutch, Portuguese, and most recently, French adventurers. In spite of extensive intermarriage, descendants of the original immigrant groups still maintain their ethnic identity, although a layer of French political culture, a single language (Comoran, a local mixture of Swahili and Arabic), and nearly universal devotion to Islam nominally unites the polity. At the same time, Comoran society reflects its feudal origins, including an established traditional hierarchy whose authority is based on genealogy, wealth, age, and Islamic piety. That traditional organization,

supported by Islamic social institutions, exerts greater influence over individual lives than does the formalized Comoran Government. It also raises difficult hurdles for political voices seeking to challenge traditional leadership.

The problem of Mahore continues to plague President Ahmed Abdullah's government. Mahore, with about 13.5 percent of the population of the Republic, remains under French administration, to the dismay of both the Comoran and the French Governments. (In so far as the islands afford France a presence in the Indian Ocean, France wishes to maintain its special relationship with the Comoros. It is suggested, for example, that France knew in advance of the coup to topple the leftist government of Ali Soilih in 1978 and chose not to intervene.) At the same time, the direct administration of Mahore has proven politically unpopular both in France and among her African allies. Moreover, that arrangement has not resulted in greater development or better administration of the island; however, its residents have consistently voted to retain nebulous ties with France rather than accept citizenship in the Comoran Republic.

b. Economy

The foundation for the Comoran economy is subsistence agriculture, supplemented by some livestock production. Chief crops are cassava, yams, rice, and corn. Non-agricultural activities include fishing, which is largely part-time, and traditional crafts. The export economy is based almost entirely on four agricultural products: vanilla, copra, cloves, and ylang-ylang (which is used for perfumes). Unfortunately, these are the same commodities produced by neighboring states; thus the Comoros have no marketing advantages.

Overall, economic prospects for the islands are dim. As in many Third World areas, the Comoros has a two-tiered economy with wide divergences in wealth between the relatively few growers and merchants--including the president--participating in the export economy, and the remaining 90 percent of the population. Industry--including tourism--is archaic; arable land shows signs of overuse; and the country, already one of the world's most densely populated, has a rapidly growing population. The state bureaucracy, the only other resource of importance in the republic, has been monopolized by the urban elite since the coup of 1978. In fact, the long-term trend in the Comoros is toward growing pauperization.

c. Government and Politics

The government of the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros is dominated by the Comoran Union for Progress, the only legal political party. President Ahmed Abdullah Abderrhamane and the National Assembly are elected without opposition by universal suffrage. The president then appoints his cabinet and nominates governors for each of the islands. Although the National Assembly enjoys broad constitutional powers, in practice it never challenges presidential prerogatives. The principal security force is not the small Comoran army, but the 40-man white mercenary force labeled the Presidential Guard.

Opposition to the president and government exists on political, ideological, and personal levels. All of the ideological opponents are to the left of the current regime and based in France or in leftist states of Africa. The largest of the opposition parties is the National Front for the Union of the Comoros (FNUC-UK), headed by Abubakar Ahmed Nuriden. It seeks the expulsion of the mercenary force and an end to political repression characteristic of traditional Comoran society. The party also includes stalwarts of the Movement for the National Liberation of the Comoros (MOLINACO)-Ali Soilih socialist government that ruled the island for 2½ years from 1975. A second opposition group, also based in France, is the National Committee for Public Welfare, headed by former UN Ambassador Said Ali Kemal. It is significantly less radical than the FNUC-UK, hoping simply to exert indirect pressure for change. Kemal also supports closer ties with the leftist (but changing) government of Madagascar and the establishment of an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace, an issue which also enjoys support from the Soviet Union. A third opposition group consists primarily of radical students and is based in Algeria. Perhaps the most vexing of all ideological foes is the alliance between the Paris-based Comoran Democratic Organization-Mpiya (OCDM) and its Comoran ally, the Democratic Front headed by Mohammed Monjoin. Although less radical than FNUC-UK or the students' group, Monjoin has publicly challenged the government, particularly on the issue of Mahore.

Comoran-based political--as distinguished from ideological--opposition is of little significance and focuses on the allocation of resources among the islands. Far more important is the rivalry among those jockeying to succeed President Abdullah. Of a similar political stripe are former Prime Minister Ali Mroudjae, Mohammed Tak, and Said Hassan Hachim, a Minister of State. All are members of what are known as Les Grandes Families and could be expected to continue the direction of the regime without change. The Presidential Guard has its own candidate, a Belgian known as Commander Charles. Presidential Guard interests are rather narrowly drawn and include land for its members and guaranteed supplies of meat, poultry, and vehicles. The candidacy of Commander Charles must be taken seriously because the Presidential Guard is the most technically sophisticated armed force on the islands. Adding to his stature is the fact that the US Embassy is currently renting a villa from him.

d. Assessment of Vulnerability to the East Bloc

While the ardent conservatism of Comoran political culture can be seen as fertile ground for the growth of radical opposition groups, the pervasive remnants of Comoran feudal society pose almost insurmountable organizing problems, especially at a time of falling expectations. As economic problems become more distressing, individuals turn to familiar remedies, which, in the Comoran case, reinforce the authority of local, traditional leaders. Moreover, the wealthiest and most influential of Comoran citizens recall unhappily the 2½ year socialist experiment of Ali Soilih and are not likely to allow even the hint of repetition. As with most of the other, equally dependent island states, a successful political intervention would entail enormous costs, and possibly, strong opposition from France for what appears to be a very small strategic advantage.

7. SEYCHELLES

a. Physical and Human Geography

The Seychelles archipelago consists of approximately 115--the exact number is unknown--granite and coralline islands scattered in the Western Indian Ocean and having a total area of 444 square kilometers, making it the smallest state in Africa. Mahe, the largest island, has an area of 148 square kilometers and lies 1,800 kilometers east of Mombasa, Kenya, 1,100 kilometers north of Madagascar, and 3,300 kilometers southwest of Bombay, India. On Mahe (population 55,000) is Victoria (population 28,000), the capital, sole port, and largest city of the archipelago. (The island of Felicite has a deep-water harbor but no port facilities.) The Seychelles are distinguished by their unspoiled beauty and pleasant climate, making them a star attraction for wealthy tourists. (As Minister of Tourism as well as President, Albert Rene has studiously avoided any measures that would open the islands to less expensive tourism.) The population of Seychelles, numbering about 65,000, forms one of the most interbred societies anywhere in the world, so much so that it is nearly impossible to ascertain the exact racial background of anyone. Race and ethnicity play only supporting roles to economic class in a study of social conflict.

b. Economy

Compared to the other island states, the Seychelles enjoys a relatively high standard of living, with a per capita income in 1983 of \$1,485. The source of its wealth is tourism, which generates 90 percent of foreign exchange, 50 percent of the GDP, and 33 percent of all government revenues. Although most Seychellois engage in some sort of farming, the soil is so poor that the islands must import 95 percent of their food. Agricultural exports include high quality copra, coconuts, bananas, and tea. Fishing is the largest non-agriculture industry after tourism. Seychelles territorial waters are among the world's richest fishing grounds, yet local fishermen employing traditional techniques cater only to the local market. The total catch processed on Mahe in 1983 came to 5,500 tons. Recently, the government has also sold fishing rights to France, Spain, North Korea, and Japan.

While tourism has been the largest source of foreign exchange, it has also exacerbated the Seychelles dependency on the West. Accordingly, the government of President Albert Rene has sought to upgrade agriculture through a program combining aid to private land owners with the establishment of four large state farms. At the same time, the government has retained control over marketing and the internal distribution networks. Fishing, also an area targeted for development, is similarly divided into state and private sectors, with the former producing for export. Only tourism lies firmly in the private sector, and even here the government has shown itself willing to grant concessions or provide support to private entrepreneurs because a portion of the aid returns to the government in the form of taxes.

c. Government and Politics

Under the constitution, the Seychelles president and National Assembly are elected by universal suffrage, with the president then appointing a

Council of Ministers. Following the 1977 coup in which then-President James Mancham was overthrown, France Albert Rene stood for election as the head of the Seychelles Peoples Progressive Front (SPPF). By 1979 constitutional revisions had abolished all opposition to the SPPF and in June 1984 Rene was again elected, unopposed, to a second term. The SPPF has broadened its influence by supporting a number of regional branches responsible for organizing and supervising discussions on government policy; however all significant policy decisions still originate with the head of state and Council of Ministers.

In its brief history the Rene regime has repeatedly faced threats from moderate and rightist opponents living in Australia, Great Britain, and South Africa. In 1981 government forces, including a sizable contingent of Tanzanians, repulsed a small force of South African mercenaries who attempted to infiltrate the island. An army mutiny in 1982 was also put down, again with the aid of Tanzanian troops. In response to charges that he is pulling Seychelles into the East bloc, President Rene insists that he is pursuing a nonaligned foreign policy. At the same time, Rene has sharply curtailed the constitutional rights of those protesting his regime's growing intimacy with Moscow by restricting rights of association and public opposition. Rene's most outspoken internal foes have included Jacques Hodoul and others from the left wing of the SPPF. Hodoul has subsequently been removed from his post of Minister of National Development on the Council of Ministers. Rene has also faced muted protests from civil servants and parastatal workers who, as is typical, have been asked to bear the burden of mandated austerity measures.

External foes of the Rene government represent the moderate center and right of Seychelles politics. The most important party is the Movement for Resistance (MPR) headed by Gerard Hoareau and Paul Chow. While MPR claims to act on behalf of deposed President James Mancham, Mancham has subsequently insisted from London that he is no longer interested in Seychelles politics. There are also numerous representatives of the upper and middle classes--and particularly the tourist industry--living in exile, including former Foreign Minister Maxime Ferrari, who resigned in June 1984, and businessman James Pillay.

d. Assessment of Vulnerability to the East Bloc

In contradistinction to the other island states, the left is currently paramount in the Seychelles, although the situation is most uncertain and could easily change. For example, there are constraints limiting Rene's flirtation with the Soviet Union, not the least of which are his own real concerns with Soviet designs for the Seychelles. But perhaps more important over the long run is the islands' attraction to well-heeled tourists whose expenditures support the government. The more prominent the influence of the Soviet Union, the less attractive will the islands become to the likes of Princess Caroline of Monaco and to the moderates on the islands who currently dominate the tourist industry. It is also possible that his own left wing might rebel should Rene, from their perspective, become alarmingly moderate. That eventuality would undoubtedly enhance Soviet fortunes, but virtually eliminate tourism on the islands.

8. MAURITIUS

a. Physical and Human Geography

The island state of Mauritius includes Mauritius itself, which has an area of 1,865 square kilometers and lies 800 kilometers east of Madagascar, and the island of Rodrigues, which lies 585 kilometers east of Mauritius and has an area of 104 square kilometers. Mauritius also has two dependencies: Agalega, comprising two islands 935 kilometers north of Mauritius, and the Cargados Carajos Shoals (St. Brandon Islands), 370 kilometers northeast of Mauritius. The last have no permanent inhabitants and are used as fishing stations.

Mauritius also claims sovereignty over Diego Garcia, a coral atoll in the Chagos Archipelago about 1,900 kilometers to the northeast. Mauritius formerly administered the archipelago until it became part of the British Indian Ocean Trust in 1976. The United States subsequently leased Diego Garcia in order to construct a naval installation and in doing so displaced some 1,000 Ilova who have been resettled on Mauritius.

The population of Mauritius, including the 35,000 residents of Rodrigues, is slightly higher than 1 million. As with the other Indian Ocean island states, its ethnic composition reflects waves of immigration. The first permanent inhabitants in the 18th century were French adventurers accompanied by slaves from Madagascar and East Africa. The descendants of those first settlers constitute the Franco-Mauritian and Creole communities on the island. Subsequently, the British captured the island and eliminated slavery, thereby inducing the practice of importing labor from India. The Indians were mostly Hindu, who currently comprise about 52 percent of the island's population, but also included Muslims. Twentieth century accretions include Tamil from Sri Lanka, who make up 17 percent of the population, and a large number of Chinese. Perhaps more than elsewhere, communalism plays a role in Mauritian politics. Historically, the Franco-Mauritian and Creole elites governed the island. Paul Berenger, who heads the multi-ethnic Mauritian Militant Movement (the only avowedly multi-ethnic political party), even campaigned on the promise to make Creole an official language. At the same time, current Prime Minister Aneerood Jugnauth, a Hindu and an opponent of the Franco-Mauritian Berenger in the 1983 elections, directed his campaign to the Hindu majority who, he claimed, were underrepresented in government. Ethnicity, then, appears increasingly to be a divisive and potentially exploitable factor in Mauritian politics.

b. Economy

The Mauritian economy, like that of Sao Tome, is an extreme example of a monocrop system. Sugar production accounts for 75 percent of foreign exchange earnings, 90 percent of cultivated land, and 28 percent of the labor force. Sixty percent of production takes place on 21 large estates (only one of which is state-owned) controlling 48,000 hectares; the remainder is produced by a total of 452 big growers and some 30,000 smaller ones, primarily Indians or Indo-Mauritians. Other agricultural exports include tea, which brings in about 5 percent of export earnings, poultry, and eggs. Tobacco growing only meets local needs, while beef production supplies approximately

16 percent of consumption. Subsistence agriculture, the dominant economic activity in all the other island states save the Seychelles, exists only on a small scale.

After sugar, the largest source of foreign exchange is tourism. That, too, however, is highly dependent on factors over which Mauritius has no control. Moreover, it is seasonal and increases imports, thus deepening Mauritian dependency.

The manufacturing sector on Mauritius is two-tiered. There is some light industry, primarily import substitution, that produces for the local market. At the same time, Mauritius has developed an Export Processing Zone (EPZ), in which local labor processes imported goods for export on the world market. The government offers both local and foreign investors attractive facilities and incentives including low wages, free repatriation of capital, profits, and dividends, free energy, exemptions from duties, tax holidays, etc. To be sure, the EPZ has succeeded in some areas, especially textiles, which employs 85 percent of all EPZ labor and accounts for 60 percent of EPZ exports. In fact, Mauritius is now the world's largest exporter of goods bearing the familiar pure-wool symbol. The EPZ has also attracted industries, such as electronics assembling and diamond polishing, that demand high dexterity.

Overall, however, the EPZ has encountered fundamental problems that make it an unreliable strategy for economic development. Mauritius has found itself in competition with vastly more powerful economies in Europe having their own interests to protect; consequently Mauritian woollens have faced quotas in both England and France, Mauritius' biggest customers. Additionally, the cost of imported goods to be processed has risen sharply in recent years, as have the costs of labor and energy, and relatively little of the earnings from the EPZ remain in Mauritius. Finally, the world-wide recession has sharply diminished demand for the goods processed on the island. Unemployment has risen to and remains at 25 percent, which unions find unacceptable.

c. Government and Politics

Mauritius is a member of the British Commonwealth; the head of state is Queen Elizabeth II, represented on the island by Governor-General Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam. The Government of Mauritius is a participatory democracy with a parliamentary system similar to that of Great Britain. It has a freely elected prime minister and unicameral legislature with legislative powers, an unusual occurrence outside Western Europe and North America. The prime minister appoints his Council of Ministers. In the case of close elections, the Governor-General intervenes on behalf of the candidate thought best suited to form a government and not necessarily the one with the higher vote total.

Of all the island states, Mauritius has the longest tradition of and respect for constitutional freedoms and civil rights. Under those conditions, opposition tends to be overt and restrained. There is, for example, an official opposition party, the Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM) in parliament. Otherwise, the press, unions, social, cultural, and political organizations--

all institutions in which discontent might fulminate under a more restrictive government--are free to press their political demands. Ominously, Mauritius also has a history of confrontational politics, sporadic violence, and, occasionally, unwarranted detention in spite of its democratic traditions.

d. Assessment of Vulnerability to the East Bloc

Since it has a relatively open political system, Mauritius is perhaps the most vulnerable of all the island states to political subversion by the East bloc. Several issues expose its fragility. Unemployment rose from 63,000 in 1983 to 73,000, or close to 25 percent of the work force, a year later. Wages discriminate against women, who are paid less, resulting, ultimately in higher male unemployment and an idle, frustrated, and politically active group. As the EPZ fails to meet expectations, the Mauritian model of development, which grants concessions to wealthier entrepreneurs, will face mounting criticism, especially from the leftist MMM.

Although vulnerable, Mauritius is not a plum waiting to be picked. Because the local economy is dependent, any policies that alienate Western partners would not be warmly received on the island, especially since the Soviet Union has proven unable to match Western generosity. And, as with the other island states on both sides of the continent, Mauritius has little strategic value when the cost of supporting the island's economy is factored in.

10. CONCLUSION

The forecast for the island states must be grim; their dependency will persist and deepen. Regional economic communities, which have recently been proposed as alternatives to dependency on the Euro-American world economy, provide few, if any, real opportunities for economic development because the island states are either too isolated--as in the case of the Seychelles--or have neighbors that are equally as poor. Since only Western nations have had both the inclination and capacity to sustain the island states, there appears little likelihood that local populations will, in effect, bite the hand that quite literally feeds them. Most, including Cape Verde, Sao Tome, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar, the Comoro Islands, and Mauritius, have at some point fostered close ties with the East that proved as empty and unrewarding as were earlier relationships with the West. Moreover, none of these states for the moment affords sufficient strategic advantage to a potential suitor that would warrant the burden of recolonization.

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